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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: ELECTION SNAPSHOT: ON THE BATTLEFIELDS OF  
POLTAVA, BYUT AND REGIONS PREVAIL

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1. (SBU) Summary: Yuliya Tymoshenko's bloc (BYuT) and Party of Regions ran the best-organized campaigns and received the top vote shares March 26 in the central Ukrainian oblast of Poltava, where in recent years the Socialist Party had held sway. BYuT's success in the more recent campaign was built on a grass roots, door-to-door strategy, combined with a decision to avoid efforts to take on entrenched mayors whose electorate showed a potential willingness to vote for BYuT in the city, oblast or national Rada races. In the run-up to the election, Poltava's polling station commissions (PSCs) and local working groups functioned well, cleaning up voters lists. There was a modest level of pre-election administrative resource abuse by the long-time Poltava "Mayor" Anatoly Kukoba on behalf of Regions and his own candidacy. On election day, there was disorganization at a handful of PSCs, leading to lines and some voters unwilling to wait more than an hour to vote walking away, but the election appeared by and large to go smoothly and calmly. End summary.

Poltava's Recent Political Winners: Socialists, Yushchenko  
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2. (U) In recent years (1998 and 2002 Rada elections, 1999 Presidential election), the Socialists had scored plurality wins in the largely agrarian central Ukrainian province of Poltava (where in 1709 Russian Tsar Peter the Great's forces bested those of Sweden's Charles XII in the decisive battle of the Great Northern War). In the oblast, which has had a tradition since independence of voting against those in power in Kiev, in the 2002 Rada elections, the Socialists received 22 percent of the vote, their top showing nationwide; Our Ukraine finished second with 20.5 percent, and the Communists third with 17.7 percent.

3. (SBU) In the 2004 presidential elections, despite heavy administrative resource abuses in favor of then-PM Yanukovych, Yushchenko scored 61 percent of the second-round vote and 66 percent of the December 26 revote. Resource abuses included a provincial media blockade of Yushchenko's campaign, only one color campaign advertising (blue) permitted, and documented busing of absentee voter caravans repeatedly voting at multiple precincts, according to Poltava Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) deputy head Mykolai Rozhentsev, who personally filmed the eight-bus caravan.

Pre-Election 2006: Well-organized, but local admin abuses  
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4. (SBU) Organization of Poltava's 2006 Rada elections seemed better than elsewhere and not marked by concerns over PSC staffing and voter lists, based on our observations March 24-25 and conversations with the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observer, Poltava CVU, and local journalists. Few PSCs did not function in February as intended due to staffing shortages. Local working groups, in conjunction with PSCs, consistently fulfilled the task of scrubbing the voters lists for last-minute changes, including striking off "dead souls" and adding students and others who had turned 18, plus occupants of houses and buildings inadvertently left off the list established by the Central Election Committee (CEC) in November 2005. Based on our survey of over 20 PSCs in Poltava city, such additions/subtractions averaged 50 names per PSC, or 2.5 percent on average of any PSC's voter list (average PSC size of 2000 voters).

5. (SBU) The only concern about administrative abuses in the 2006 cycle related to the heavy-handed actions of Poltava city's political don Anatoly Kukoba, who has run the city as his personal fiefdom since 1990, prior to independence. Kukoba, elected to both the Rada (as an independent) and to the mayor's office in 2002, prevented a by-election from occurring after he chose to assume his Rada mandate; Poltava has thus been without an official mayor since 2002, though Kukoba fulfills the role for ceremonial occasions. Kukoba, now affiliated with Party of Regions, attempted to repeat elements of Regions' 2004 strategy in the 2006 cycle at the local level. Poltava formed its Kukoba-dominated Territorial Election Committee (TEC) for local elections in late December, two days prior to passage of the law governing TEC formation. The TEC and Kukoba-dominated local courts

subsequently refused to allow the Socialist Party, Our Ukraine, and Pora to register candidates for the Poltava city council race; all three parties belatedly gained registration through a decision of the Poltava oblast appellate court. Kukoba also used municipal workers to hang Regions' campaign banners over Poltava's streets pro bono, according to local journalists.

BYuT's strategy: grass roots org, avoid local dons

16. (SBU) The CVU and journalists accurately predicted that the strongest two parties in the March 26 elections would be BYuT and Regions, based on superior organization and an ability to tap into Poltava's tradition of voting against those in power. The Socialists, currently dominant in the oblast administration (governor and all five deputies), had not organized themselves well in this cycle and would be punished for being "in power," according to Vasyl Neyizhmak, head of the Poltava Press Club. As of 1030 March 28, with about 85 percent of precincts reporting, the CEC's website indicated that BYuT led the voting with between 22.5 and 33.5 percent in eight of nine electoral districts in Poltava, with Regions leading in an industrialized, Russian-speaking district bordering Dnipropetrovsk.

17. (SBU) BYuT's deputy campaign chair for Poltava, Oleksandr Zaluzhnyi, explained to us March 24 BYuT's strategy for success, which he said followed BYuT's nationwide strategy. BYuT had pursued a grass-roots, door-to-door campaign strategy. BYuT's campaign staff named a team leader for every precinct; each team leader had 4-5 assistants, and the precinct teams divided the precinct between them, going door to door to identify voters potentially willing to support BYuT. The teams then targeted that list of potential voters with campaign literature on follow-up visits. BYuT did not waste its effort and money on generalized activities or involvement in mayoral races that it could not win, instead focusing energies on the Rada races at various levels: national parliament (Verkhovna Rada), plus oblast and city/town councils. In Poltava city, that meant not joining the opposition coalition to unseat "Mayor" Kukoba, because BYuT's initial surveys showed many of Kukoba's entrenched electorate willing to vote for BYuT for the various Rada races.

Election day/night: smooth overall with a couple of bumps

18. (SBU) Election day in Poltava city's election district 142 went largely smoothly, with only isolated incidents of poor organization leading to lines and waits of up to an hour to vote. Of the 20 PSCs we visited on election day, 17 were well-organized with minimal lines; only three PSCs suffered from disorganization connected to the issuance of five separate ballots to voters, which led to a limited number of would-be voters walking away rather than waiting to vote. PSC number 66, located in an agrarian university, was the most chaotic we saw, with a line of 150 voters waiting in line to vote at 2130, a half-hour before poll closing. We observed the count at PSC 67, the district's designated absentee voter PSC; the count of 1683 votes cast went slowly but smoothly, with the Rada vote count completed without incident at 0730 the next morning, March 27. (Note: The vote count posted on the CEC website jibed with the tally our observers recorded.)

Organization, rather than personality, won the day

19. (SBU) Comment: Election results in Poltava appeared to demonstrate the value of old-fashioned grass roots party organization, combined with an ability to tap into voter discontent with the perceived parties in power -- in Poltava's case, Our Ukraine and the Socialists. A lack of organization also contributed to two other election day losers in the oblast, the Communist party and Rada Speaker Lytvyn's bloc. The latter spent heavily on advertising and had many rural district chiefs on its roster, but these local "names" and national money did not compensate for the lack of effective organization or any sense of what Lytvyn's bloc represented, other than getting into office.

110. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at: [www.state.gov/p/eur/kiev](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/kiev).  
Herbst